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AN EARLY AMERICAN PUBLISHER AND HIS AUDIENCE

Publication in the America of the twentieth century is not associated with the newcomer. The immigrants now arriving among us are seldom of the intellectual stuff of which editors and publishers are made, and an increasing number of them are further handicapped by the difficulties of what to them is a foreign language. To-day America no longer feels intellectually subordinate, as she did even as late as Emerson's time. Moreover, any immigrant now arriving would no longer, though the owner of no more elaborate plant than a second-hand printing press, feel himself capable of competing with our largest publishing houses.

Such were not the conditions a century and a quarter ago. The newly arriving immigrant, fleeing often from political persecution, was a man of unusual energy and of high culture. Born a natural leader in his own country, he became by inherent force of personality one in his new environment. America in its formative period owes much in an intellectual way to such immigrants as Hugh Gaines and Mathew Carey, bookdealers and publishers.

Mathew Carey, after a conflict with the British government, because of a defence of his native Ireland in his newspaper, came to this country in 1784. He landed in Philadelphia, and soon established a publishing house, which exists at the present day. Little capital was needed at that time, other than energy and determination, and these Carey had in large measure.

He had been fortunate in the choice of a location for his future career. Unlike most European countries, during the last few centuries at least, the United States has witnessed several changes in its intellectual centre, which seems, though there may be room for difference of opinion, to have gravitated from Boston to Philadelphia, and then to New York. At any rate, during the latter part of the eighteenth century that eminence was held by Philadelphia. The American Philosophical Society, the most learned body in America, had been founded and met

there; the Library Company of Philadelphia, "the mother of all North American subscription libraries", had been established there in 1731; and from 1790 to 1800 it was the capital of the United States in letter as it had so long been in fact.

When, therefore, Carey, after various vicissitudes, had firmly established a publishing house, he had the best possible American audience in his immediate neighborhood, one as cultured and as fond of reading as could be found even in Puritan New England, and with probably a greater prosperity to enable it to satisfy that demand. Moreover, Carey, as a publisher, occupied a strategic position. Perhaps the prayer of Sir William Berkeley, governor of Virginia, in 1670,—“I thank God there are no free schools, nor printing; and I hope we shall not have, these hundred years; for learning has brought disobedience, and heresy, and sects into the world, and printing has divulged them, and libels against the government. God keep us from both”—had not been clearly heard. But at any rate, there were in the eighteenth century too few presses in the South to offer any great amount of competition to an aggressive and well-equipped publisher. The South and, later, the Southwest became, therefore, territory largely occupied by the great publishing house of Mathew Carey. And in all this territory there were many people eager to read.

The problem then became not one, as in the present day, of outstripping rival houses in a fierce competition, but merely that of reaching the people. The canvasser seems to have been actively employed by the largest and most dignified firms, and, in the absence of means of rapid communication, his leisurely progress from point to point is sometimes humorously in contrast to modern hustle. For example, one Mr. Stewart, a canvasser for the firm of Mathew Carey, made a little journey in behalf of the spread of knowledge in the fall of 1790. As the landed gentry in the part of Pennsylvania which he visited were book-buyers, if not book readers, Mr. Stewart seems to have felt it to his interest as an energetic agent to become one of them for the moment. Accordingly, one of the items in the bill he sends back to his employer is one shilling, three pence, as the expenses of a fox chase. The admiration of the country

squires for him as a hunter, if he was in at the death, doubtless made them more willing to buy some elaborately bound set of Pope or of Dr. Johnson as an ornament for the best room. The enthusiasm of the book agent as a hunter seems to have been up to the standard demanded by the sporting instincts of his prospective buyers. At any rate, in gallantly charging a ditch he lost his hat, for just after the entry of one shilling three pence for breakfast next morning, there is a record of one shilling, ten and one halfpence for a hat.

If the sporting instincts of the Pennsylvanians artfully played upon rendered them easy victims of the book-agent, those same instincts, even more fully developed, of the people further south were utilized to a greater advantage. Pious Parson Weems, who invented the George Washington hatchet story, was not averse to sinful horse-racing — when it aided business. Through his facile brain floated numberless schemes of spreading enlightenment broadcast. There were few places in the South that he did not canvass. In 1809 he wrote to his employer concerning a long list of books:—

“Charleston would be the grand place of deposit for S. Carolina. In the beginning of February every Gentleman of wealth from the Country is sure to be in the town — partly on account of the annual Great Races which are then run. And were I at that time to be spirited by support with books, maps, prints, etc., I might greatly hush the groanings of your long-strained shelves.”

The parson is not averse to pushing his own cause as an author, for he continues: “And morally certain am I, that if, at any time, I could but have them, neatly finished, I should be able to sell and to put into rapidly selling hands from 2 to 4000 copies of Washington and as many of Marion and of Mary Findley.” The Washington and the Marion here referred to were more or less imaginative biographies of these two heroes, and among the “best sellers”, especially in the South, they were conspicuous for a long period. And indeed their days of error are hardly finished yet.

Not enough attention was paid at this time to drawing the dollar out of the pocket of the heedless through the use of striking cover designs and taking titles. In this same letter, Weems

acts as a sort of literary adviser when he writes: "In the printed catalogues I think all fair advantage ought to be taken of such publications as would, if displayed, strike the public eye & excite curiosity, ex.g. 'Gass's Journal.' Now 9-10ths have never heard of Gass, and therefore take not more interest in his Journal than in the Journal of a Logger-head tarapin. But were they to be told that it is a 'Journal up the Great Missouri River, across the Western Mountains & down the waters of the Columbia to the South Sea by a Companion of Captains Lewis & Clarke' almost every 10th man would become a purchaser."

The canvasser remained in good reputation for a long time as a means of introducing literature of every sort to the public, although he may not have been quite so catholic in what he offered as to carry "a prospectus for a Bible, a Dictionary, and Directory, Robinson Crusoe, a Newspaper or an Almanac", as one canvasser thought a rival did. Yet he gradually lost his relative importance because of the number of associations that were formed between the leading publishers for the exchange of works, through the gradual growth of advertising hand-bills and newspaper and magazine advertisements. It would not be wise, however, to conclude that Carey or any other publisher of his time approached his public through any very great outlay of newspaper or magazine advertising. No crude, though profitable, illustrations of the critics cutting a cake (supposed to symbolize a novel) with great gusto, such as was employed not so very long ago by a great publishing house, no saturnalia of advertising expenses, such as recently marked the publishing business, was ever seen or ever took place. Reader and publisher alike were too leisurely, at least until the disconcerting appearance of Scott.

The postmasters of the eighteenth century had to be reckoned with by publishers in their attempts to reach the public, not only in the case of the magazine but also in that of books. Subscriptions to costly works were obtained and the subscribers' names inserted in the volumes. Postmasters were often active in securing these subscriptions. In the large body of the correspondence of the firm of Mathew Carey, which is still extant, the free letters of postmasters occur in such numbers that their abuse of the franking privilege to carry on private business is clearly appar-

ent. They even went so far as to discriminate in the mails against their rivals, were they, as was in a few places the case, publishers or printers themselves. Those who have read their *Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* recently will recall that Franklin charges the postmaster of Philadelphia in 1729, who was a business rival, with discriminating against one of his publications, and Carey has a similar charge in 1792. In the meanwhile, the public was slowly being reached through the means that have already been enumerated, and in the case of Mathew Carey the South was open and almost undebated ground.

The avidity of the public for something to read seems to have varied in a rather remarkable degree according to locality. Or perhaps some agents, not being able to enter into fashionable pastimes, and not therefore winning large orders through their ingratiating personality, have maligned certain districts. At any rate, as late as 1821, James Pennoyer, who was agent for M. Carey & Son, writes in disgust from New Orleans, which, according to him, was anything but a literary centre at that period. His landlord, he says, charged him "250 cents a day. You can hardly", he continues, "get a man to open his mouth for less than 50 cts." And the dearth of copper was appalling. Perhaps it would be out of place to call Mr. Pennoyer a literary free-lance, though assured he deserved the last of these terms, if wandering as restlessly as any Sir John Hawkwood of them all, be a criterion; for there were few places in America at that period that did not have a chance to test his wares.

It is different at Eaton, Georgia, in the same year. The agent fares little better so far as actual sales are concerned; but he is cheered by the fact that the people want books, though they have no money. Perhaps he returns another day.

But when the earliness of the period and the scarcity of the population are considered, there were some real literary centres in the South and West at the beginning of the nineteenth century. As early as 1813, a correspondent of Carey's at Louisville, Kentucky, speaks of "my predecessor", and orders what was for that time an extremely large shipment of books. For a city that had received almost its first settler not more than thirty-eight years before, Louisville, it seems, had decided early for high

thinking. It would be interesting to follow these books in their slow journey across the Alleghenies and down the yet limpid Ohio to their final destination.

At the beginning of the last century, Baltimore received the larger part of her books from Philadelphia. Further to the south Carey reached a numerous public through the prosperous distributing centres of Wilmington, Delaware, Raleigh, North Carolina, Charleston, South Carolina, and especially through Dumfries, Virginia, and Whitehall, North Carolina. Carey's agent at Dumfries reports in 1799 that he has books on hand to the amount of £538—a large sum for those days. Three years before, the invoice had covered thirty closely written pages of foolscap and had amounted to £470.

In the Southwest was Nashville, Tennessee, while Cincinnati and Zanesville, Ohio, and Pittsburgh were frequently demanding books; though it must be remembered that the last two particularly were frontier towns with an especially large and growing *hinterland* behind them.

What, in the meanwhile, was the character of these books which were being read by these people of the central states,—the South and the West? In the first place, they were practically of the same class that were being demanded in all the rest of the country,—New York and New England.

In his *Travels in New England and New York* (1821-22), Timothy Dwight, who had the tender nurture of the Yale youth in his charge, piously observes: "Between the Bible and novels there is a gulf fixed which few novel-readers are willing to pass. The consciousness of virtue, the dignified pleasure of having performed one's duty, the serene remembrance of a useful life, the hope of an interest in the Redeemer, and the promise of a glorious inheritance in the favor of God are never found in novels."

There are no gems of pure ray like this in the Carey correspondence, but some few of his public seem to have regarded novels as dangerous things to tamper with for any who had a soul to save. Yet the very fact that Dwight feels called upon to denounce novels shows that their appalling shadow of evil was even then being cast over the land. But Dwight was be-

hind his time in his opposition. At least two of the best sellers at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century were novels—Mrs. Rowson's *Charlotte Temple* (1790) and Mrs. Roche's *Children of the Abbey*, the latter of which sells even yet.

In fact, by 1821 novels formed almost as large a proportion of the reading of the American public as it does at the present day. This was especially the case of the leisure class in the South, and even in New England before the end of the eighteenth century the voice of one of her most prominent men of letters is raised in behalf of something less solemn than "Day of Dooms" as literary diet. The comparatively large leisure class of the South, containing many men and women of high education and with more toleration for the amusements of life, read novels without trembling for their souls. In 1816 Bushrod Washington, favorite nephew of General Washington and heir to Mount Vernon, writing from Mount Vernon, sold Carey \$104.30 worth of novels which had been lately imported for Mrs. Washington. The purchasing power of the sum here indicated at this early period, the fact that it is for second-hand books, and that it represents imported novels only, and those but for a short period preceding the date, all go to show that the public, in one case at least, was seeking reading in large quantities quite as ephemeral as is its mental food to-day.

The instance is not an unusual one. The Carey sales and account books show long and frequent entries of books that are largely novels. Carey had one very active agent at Raleigh, North Carolina, named Winifred Gales. (Whether Miss or Mrs. research telleth not.) Miss Gales was apparently among that class that had, to use the term of the pious president of Yale, crossed the "gulf". And she saw to it that a large number of others crossed over. Possibly the bridge was wider than Mohammed's bridge, *Al Sirat*, and *did* have "side battlements" and "extra room enough for a razor's edge." If the reader be curious to know what our forefathers were risking their souls over he would, unless a special specialist in such matters, be unable to recognize more than the following titles out of a typical

order from Raleigh, in 1801: *Children of the Abbey*, *Arthur Merwyn*, *Evelina*, *Pamela*, *Sir Charles Grandison*, *Clarissa Harlowe*, *Mysteries of Udolpho*, *Charlotte Temple*, *Joseph Andrews*, *Sicilian Romance*, and *Caleb Williams*. The rest of the thirty-eight titles are totally antique; though *The Devil to Pay* does sound quite modern.

There was another side to all this, however. If there were frivolous readers of novels, it was apparently not because the budding mind of the youths of the land received a wrong bias in the schools. Many at least of the pedagogues of a century ago seem to have been preternaturally destitute of a sense of humor. One John Parke, writing from Calerian Township, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, in 1798, suggests many changes in Carey's *Columbian Spelling and Reading Book*. "Had the spaces", he writes, "occupied by the Cuts been filled up with additional columns of spelling-words, I should have esteemed it of much greater utility. For I find that my pupils are overly fond of pictures and waste too much time, as well as destroy their books, in turning over the leaves continually looking at them." No coddling, sugar-coated education here surely.

In 1801 a teacher sent Carey a copy of a letter from "an eminent teacher", reviewing "the new school-book", *The American Monitor*, which had been published by Carey. The tone is not exactly that employed by the reviewers of the present day. "The pieces are numerous, and the morals contained in them such as cannot fail to inspire Youth with a love of those cardinal Virtues, which unite and adorn civilized society. Morality seems to have been the pole-star of the Compiler:— And good MORALS will lead the mind to the love of RELIGION, as naturally as the genial warmth of the sun kindles that of vegetation, which spreads a profusion of flowers on the bosom of the earth." The reviewer's model of a textbook seems here to be something approaching the—

	Heaven to find
	The Bible mind,
and	
	My book and heart
	Must never part,—

of the orthodox seventeenth century *New England Primer*, rather than that fallen one of the nineteenth century with its utter worldliness of—

'Tis youth's delight
To fly their kite.

Special times and special sections required special literature, though there was as a whole very little difference in the needs of the general reader, at least if the Puritans of New England be omitted for the moment. However, as was natural, the War of 1812 brought out a fair amount of military literature, and though Carey knew his public thoroughly, he has at least one mistake chalked up against him. In 1814 he received a letter from Burlington, New Jersey, that runs as follows:—

“I did suppose thee a man of that extensive knowledge which embraced among other things the *principal* Tenets of the People called Quakers. Judge therefore of my surprise when I beheld ‘20 Copies of *Sword Exercises*’ sent up to be ‘despatched’. I called myself into council on this occasion extraordinary and concluded that I had only two ways consistent with my cloth to have these assistants to the destroyer despatched, viz., to put them into a good large fire (the operation here would have been immediate) or to despatch them whence they came. In the midst of my reverie, a person with whom I am acquainted hove in sight and he offered to take these irreligious books out of my sight.”

The South as a whole, it has already been intimated, was slightly more catholic in its choice of reading material than the rest of the country. Another thing which draws attention to this section was its love of substantial bindings, such as might fittingly adorn the walls of the drawing-room of the old colonial mansions. That farrago of fact and fiction (mostly the latter, perhaps), Goldsmith's *Animated Nature*, delighted the eyes of the master of the mansion by its brave exterior, and the eyes of his children through its menagerie of illustrations, in a very large number of Southern homes. Carey published a Bible and an atlas that were equally elaborate.

In the West and Middle West the visitor who is fond of exploring old attics may yet find copies of Dr. Blank's *Complete Medical Guide* warranted to contain a cure for anything that

flesh is heir to, whether it be man flesh suffering from gout or horse flesh suffering from glanders. Such manuals are symptomatic. They indicate a stage of culture, perhaps, but even more do they indicate the lack of density of population. It is not surprising, then, that Carey published and sold for other publishers large numbers of such manuals. Dealing, as he did, with a horse-loving public, his sales of *The Pocket Farrier* and especially of *The Horse Doctor* were large. With no trained veterinarians and the nearest doctor of all flesh twenty miles away, the favorite steed might die, were it not for the ever-ready volume on the mantel.

Symptomatic, too, of the culture of our America at this period are the large number of orders received by Carey for somebody's *Ladies' Friend* and some one else's *Female Mentor* and *Duties of Females*. *Vade Mecums* are sown broadcast, and *Letter Writers* are numerous enough to have produced a people with the charming epistolary grace of a Walpole.

Yet even on the frontier of Lexington, Kentucky, as early as 1813, Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are ordered in numbers with which even the combined forces of *The Pleasures of Hope*, *The Pains of Memory*, and *The Horrors of St. Domingo* cannot compete; while Cicero, Horace, and Vergil are among the books much called for at Augusta, Georgia, in 1817. Wherever a town sprang up and reached any degree of importance and stability, it apparently soon had at least a small coterie of the lovers of the classics.

In the absence of any accurate information as to the bindings of the works listed in the many bills, it is very hard to determine the price of books a century ago as compared with those of to-day. One thing, of course, is true—that the public of those days paid much higher for their reading than it does to-day. In 1799, Carey's invoice at Dumfries, Virginia, listed Smollet's *Works* (6 volumes) at £5; *The Rambler* (4 volumes) at £1, 4 shillings; *Clarissa Harlowe* (8 volumes) at £2, 13 shillings, and Shakespeare's *Works* (8 volumes) at £2, 10 shillings, and other books in proportion. When a substantial margin is added to these figures for the retail price, and when the purchasing value of money in 1799 is considered, it becomes clear that our forefathers must have been willing to make great sacrifices for culture and education.

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